

Volunteering in London's Green Spaces

2012 Audit

by the
**London Parks and
Green Spaces Forum**



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Organisation that completed surveys:

- Landowners
- Volunteering organisations
- Friends Groups

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

This audit covers 2012 and repeats previous audits carried out in 2011, 2010 and 2009. The background is discussed more fully in other reports available by contacting the London Parks and Green spaces Forum (hereafter known as the Forum) at tony.leach@london.gov.uk.

The purpose of these audits is to identify trends and changes; and to begin building a longitudinal datasets. It can also provide an opportunity to reflect on progress made on the recommendations of the Volunteering Strategy for London's parks and green spaces that was produced in 2011. The definition of volunteering is given below.

The volunteering data includes both formal volunteering which tends to be carried out by volunteering organisations and landowners, as well as informal volunteering which is generally led by Friends Groups; though the latter is often a mix of both.

Definition of volunteers used in this survey

WHERE volunteering takes place:

In parks, green open spaces or ponds/lakes/canals/watercourses.

Sites must be freely accessible to the public.

Private land can be included, such as: farmland; Wildlife Trust or National Trust sites or similar; where an entrance fee is normally payable but freely accessible through volunteering; nature reserves with restricted access.

Housing estates and allotments EXCLUDED.

WHAT types of volunteers are INCLUDED in this survey?

Individual adults

Young people (16+ with parental consent)

Groups (corporate and non-corporate)

Friends' Groups

WHAT types of volunteers/volunteering are EXCLUDED from this survey?

Where the volunteering opportunity is "by invitation only"

"Punitive volunteering", such as payback projects

Volunteering that is rewarded.

The key issue is that volunteering time is given freely.

2 Executive Summary

The 2012 survey shows a drop in number of respondents in the three categories of landowners, volunteering organisations and Friends Groups (FG), with the most significant drop of 76% from Friends Groups. Responses from landowners have also dropped by 58%. Overall, the surveys received only 42 responses, a drop of 62% from 2011.

40% of landowners expect volunteering to increase, whereas only 20% of Friends Groups expect the trend to increase.

Only 38% of **landowners** recorded the cost of volunteering, ranging from £4,320 to £6,500 p.a. Some noted the value of community outreach is hard to put into numbers. [As this only represents landowners it cannot be used as a definite pointer for future investment].

63% of **landowners** fund volunteers with a dedicated budget, a significant increase from last year's result where none suggested there was a dedicated budget, and most were from various sources. This year's funding was more focused, reflecting the scrutiny budgets undergo, but some still include them in the general parks budget.

60% of **volunteering organisations** and 48% of **Friends Groups** welcomed any volunteers. Very few aimed at specific groups, except for some particular events.

Over half of both **Friends Groups** and **volunteering organisations** provided training. Of which, **volunteering organisations** provide the most training at 80%.

Most **landowners** 78% want to make links with local health providers, while only 56% and 40% of **volunteering groups** and **Friends Groups** are interested in making links.

Despite low public awareness, 71% of **Friends Groups** are interested in working with GiGL.

In summary the audit shows:

- Rarely are landowners fully dependent on volunteers as most work is carried out by staff and contractors. Volunteers provide added value.
- Main driver(s) for volunteering: to improve biodiversity (landowners); for education & to improve biodiversity (volunteering organisations); to improve their parks (Friends Groups).
- The trend of volunteering is likely to stay the same, though landowners have a greater aspiration for volunteering to increase compared to Friends Groups.
- There continues to be a need for landowners to be more strategic in developing volunteering.
- There is a need for more supervisory staff and budget to prevent the number of volunteers decreasing.
- Both landowners and volunteering organisations worked with Friends Groups for volunteering recruitment and supervision. There is potential for more cross-sectorial working between the groups.
- There is possibility for more collaborative work between Friends Groups and GiGL to gather biological data about their local parks.

3 Methodology

Surveys were used to gather data from landowners, volunteering organisations and Friends Groups. Questions were not modified from previous surveys to assist comparison. Additional questions relating to Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) were added at the end of the survey.

Online surveys were sent out to landowners, volunteering organisations and Friends Groups via website: Survey Monkey. Contacts were drawn from database to reach the appropriate person(s). On January 3rd 2013, an explanatory email with a web link to relevant questionnaire was sent to individual contacts.

The survey contained questions based on:

- Cost of volunteering
- Number of volunteers and volunteering hours
- Drivers for volunteering
- Support required for volunteering
- Funding issues
- Trend for volunteering in the future
- Training provided
- Links with local health provider

Respondents were also asked to provide any comments they have regarding volunteering at their sites and in London as a whole.

Date of completion was 15th February 2013. Non-respondents were followed up and given an extension of time the end of March 2013.

4 Summary of Landowner's responses

Most responding landowners were Local Authorities.

10 [24] responses were recorded from various landowners in the survey; including 8 [16] London Boroughs, Alexandra Palace Charitable Trust and Active Newham.

All [96%] landowners had volunteer involvement on their land in 2012. Of which, 43% [26%] of landowners had a volunteering policy; while 14% [42%] had a volunteering strategy.

The top five drivers from 2009-2012 for involving volunteers were, in order of ranking:

Table 1: Ranking of drivers of involving volunteers, 2009-2012

Drivers	2009	2010	2011	2012
Biodiversity	1	2	2	1
Social/encourage community involvement	2	1	1	2
Food growing	5	6	6	3
Health	4	4	3	4=
Education	3	3	4	4=
Money saving	0	5	5	4=

“Encouraging community involvement” and “improving biodiversity” remain the top two drivers for landowners to involve volunteers. Food growing had a significant increase from the bottom ranks to ranking third in 2012. There was also a tie between health, education and money saving; in which money saving showed a gradual increase in ranking from 2009 to 2012.

In addition to the ranking over the past four years, this year's breakdown of reasons is shown in Table 1. All landowners agreed that improving biodiversity was a reason to involve volunteers, while 90% wanted to encourage community involvement. “Food growing” has risen from 24% (2011) to 40%.

Answer	Landowners response
to improve biodiversity	100.0%
to encourage community involvement	90.0%
for education	30.0%
to improve health	30.0%
for food growing	40.0%
to save money	30.0%

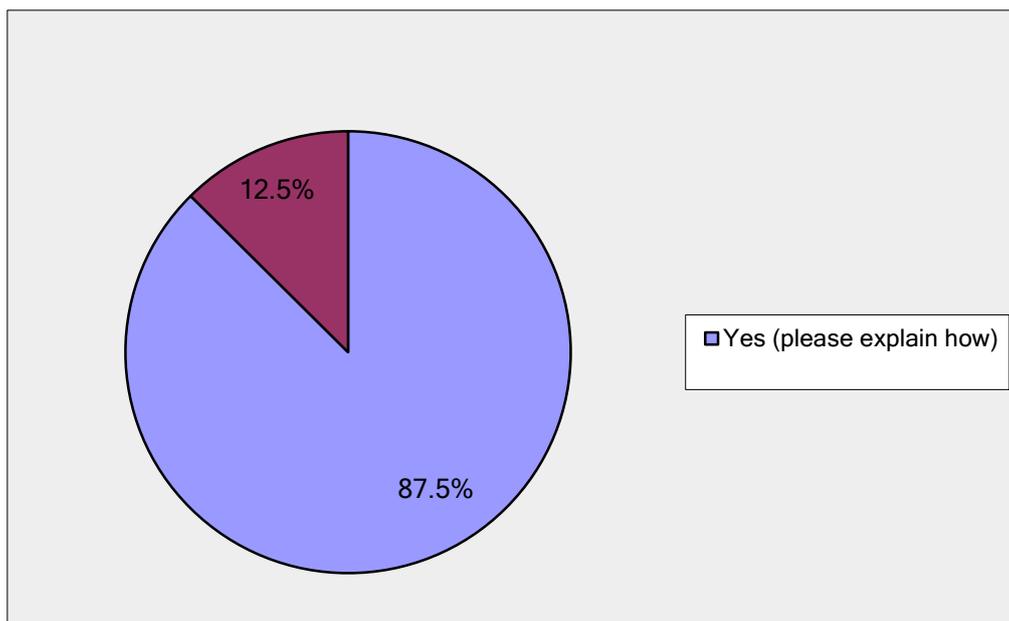
Fig. 1 Reason for involving volunteers in 2012

However, one mentioned that the lack of budget and staff to supervise volunteers is a factor that will prevent them from using more.

All [96%] landowners offered practical volunteering activities, some offered health related activities and there was only one landowner that offered all types of volunteering activities. Other activities like conservation projects were offered by one landowner.

87.5% of respondents would still organise such activities even without. One suggested that some Friends Groups are well set and self sufficient on volunteering; while corporate volunteers require leading and organising. More details of how to run the activities, and reasons for why not to organise them without volunteers are shown in Fig. 2.

Fig 2: Would the activities take place without volunteers?



To recruit volunteers, 90% [90%] of the landowners will seek from Friends’ Groups, showing a steady pattern comparing with last year’s data. Words of mouth showed an increase and ranks second in 2012 with 80% [62%]. Some corporate groups approached landowners directly to look to volunteering e.g. Orange Rockcorps for Southwark. Other means include advertisement on various events and conservation task days; through schools and volunteer centre, etc.

Website*	Word of mouth	Newsletters	Local Volunteer Centre	Friends’ Groups	Other organisations**
5	8	5	5	9	6

*: websites include council website, TCV; social media.

** : Community groups; brokers like BitC, CSV and Southward Volunteer Centre to find and organise volunteers; *AreaParks Team*, who actively promote volunteering as one of the key service objectives in Islington.

90% [83%] do not have specially targeted types of volunteers in general, although sometimes in specific events or walking groups, they might have targeted groups, e.g. disabled people. Also, the organisations that landowners use might have special targets.

However, Islington did target volunteers including adults, elderly and young people (16+), unemployed, walking groups and those with mental health issues as well as at risk from exclusion.

The increase of Friends' Groups supervising volunteers continued through 2012, rising from 67% to 80%. 60% [90%] of the landowners supervise their volunteers, followed by supervision from volunteering organisations with 40% [62%], e.g. TCV and London Wildlife Trust. Both are showing a drop.

38% of landowners did not know the cost of volunteering to them; another 38% provided a cost ranging from £4,320-£6,500 per annum. Some pay volunteering organisations like TCV per project. However, some recognised the difficulty in quantifying the value on volunteering,

"Difficult to say as we save money by getting extra work done but obviously invest a lot of time and effort into working with volunteers. Also impossible to put a cost on the community outreach value."

- Ealing Council

62.5% of respondents said volunteering was funded by dedicated budget. Other funding includes: general park budget, or are parts of existing budgets of materials, staff costs and equipments provision, etc. Some volunteers, like the business volunteers, come with funding.

Only 7 [11] London Boroughs responded to the question about numbers of volunteers and volunteering hours. Seven Boroughs had a total of around 4217 [9,900] volunteers, averaging 602 [900] volunteers per borough, showing a drop of 298 volunteers. Further, volunteering hours in the seven Boroughs ranged from 112 to 30,000 [696 to 29,500] hours, accumulated a total volunteering hours of 47,900 [120,826] hours.

The majority 60% of the sites were not fully dependent on volunteers, as shown in Fig. 3. Some landowners noted that some core works were done by contractors or their own staff; having volunteers will add efficiency to projects. However, some said volunteers were essential. Further, none of the landowners arranged for contingency plans if they lose volunteers' input.

Fig. 3 Chart showing if any of landowner's sites are fully dependent on volunteers

Answer	Response
No	60.0%
Yes (please Specify)	40.0%

"...we value volunteers to 'add value', get jobs done faster and target issues where numbers can make a visible and tangible impact"

- Lambeth Council

Fig.4 Landowners' views on volunteering trend

Answer	Response
Increasing	40.0%
Decreasing	0.0%
About the same	40.0%
Don't know	20.0%

There was no comment about volunteering decreasing, as more landowners are encouraging works with volunteers. One respondent suggested that the Olympic Games in 2012 should be taken into account in looking at volunteering trends. All [89%] of the respondents showed interest in expanding volunteering projects on their land in the future. Some suggested that time and budget were the main limitations in the expansion; while most are keen to explore more opportunities for volunteers, for example recruiting Volunteer Officer (Alexandra Palace Charitable Trust)¹, or to get them more involved in day to day running of the parks than one-off projects. Other suggestions include:

“Primarily through 'adopting' a named open space or 'mentoring' a specific group, especially if volunteers bring pro bono skills or specialisation”

“Working on policy and centralised ways of co-ordinating volunteers, while keeping it flexible.”

70% do not have formal links with local health provider, but 77.8% would want to be put in contact with local health provider to develop health-related activities/volunteering; while some showed concerns in costs.

Further thoughts on volunteering offered by Landowners:

Volunteering depends heavily on having enough staff to organise, manage and supervise volunteers. However, it is increasingly difficult to find these resources in the current climate. If local government loses staff, it curtails what they can do with volunteers. There is a need in a more centralised but flexible approach. Nonetheless, even with more work, it is even more important to create and maintain “community links”.

¹ Recruitment of Volunteering Officer will start in 2013, who are responsible in the cultural aspects of the Palace and the practical efforts in the park

5 Summary of Volunteering Organisations' responses

Responses were received from 10 [11] volunteering organisations, including some new respondents, but at the same time, have lost some that have been surveyed in the previous two years.

Out of 10 responses, 50% had volunteering policy and 50% had volunteering strategy in place. Of which, 3 had both policy and strategy; while 2 had neither.

30% of volunteering organisations offer Londoners volunteering opportunities elsewhere outside. Another 70% only offer opportunities within London. Further, all [100%] respondents had volunteers involved in parks and open spaces; 60% [70%] of them also involved volunteers in lakes, canals and/or watercourses.

The top six drivers for Volunteering Organisations in using volunteers are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranking of drivers of involving volunteers, 2009-2012

Drivers	2009	2010	2011	2012
Being a "volunteering organisation"	No data	No data	No data	No data
Education	3	3	1	1=
Improve biodiversity	2	2	2	1=
Health programme	4	5	3=	4=
Food growing	6	6	3=	4=
Other reasons	5	4	5	4=

From Table 2, "education" remained as the main reason for Volunteering Organisations to use volunteers, while being able to improve biodiversity has also jumped into top ranked reason. Some organisations also involve volunteers because of particular events, e.g. Open Garden Squares Weekend or Quaker Meeting.

9 respondents [10] provided a broad range of practical activities for volunteers, including maintenance and conservation of the park and assisting visitors or events. Among them, 3 also provided health related volunteering activities. Further, 44% of the Volunteering Organisations work with Friends' Groups, 33% work with corporate organisations and 22% work with both Friends' Groups and corporate organisations.

Use of websites and word of mouth remained the two most popular ways to recruit volunteers. Both were used by 80% of the respondents, showing a drop from 100% (websites) and 90% (word of mouth) from last year's survey. The use of newsletter ranked third, with 70%; while use of local volunteer centres, friends groups, other volunteering organisations were used by 40% of the respondents. Other methods include referral of partners or the use of leaflets.

This year has shown a dramatic drop of Volunteering Organisations in carrying out volunteer's satisfaction surveys to get feedbacks of their programme, from 70% last year to 20% in 2012.

20% [50%] target specific groups of volunteers, e.g. sedentary, obese, diabetic, those with mental illness or unemployed. While 60% have volunteers from any categories, group of elderly volunteers show the largest proportion with 80%, followed by adults and young people, each with 70%.

60% supervised the volunteers by their own staff, while 40% [30%] were by Friend's Groups. Some were supervised by leaders trained in their own leadership programme, while some supervised themselves.

50% [33%] do not charge their landowners, while 90% [89%] do not charge their volunteers for their services. Some charged landowners entry and membership fee, while some were funded by Councils or Environmental Trust.

80% of Volunteering Organisations provided training to the volunteers, 70% [87%] trained volunteers with knowledge of basic use of tools and equipment; 60% [87%] trained them about health and safety and 50% [37%] taught supervisory and leadership skills.

40% funded volunteering from their income, including corporate sponsors, events and trusts. 20% funded with dedicated budget; another 20% funded with both income and dedicated budget. The rest did not have any budget for volunteering activities. Further, 50% did not record the cost of volunteering to their organisation. For those that have recorded, most believed there was no or minimal cost.

Only 20% [62%] did not record volunteering numbers or hours. Eight [3] organisations recorded a total of over 147,000 [20,200] hours, from 20 to 120,000 hours per annum; involving over 11,000 volunteers. Volunteering took place from a variety of sites, including London Wetland Centre, Quaker Gardens, Shrewsbury Park and Pensford Field Environmental Trust. However, it is important to note that recording/reporting volunteering hours and numbers cannot give a fair nor comprehensive picture of volunteering activities in London.

Fig. 5 Volunteering Organisations' views on volunteering trend

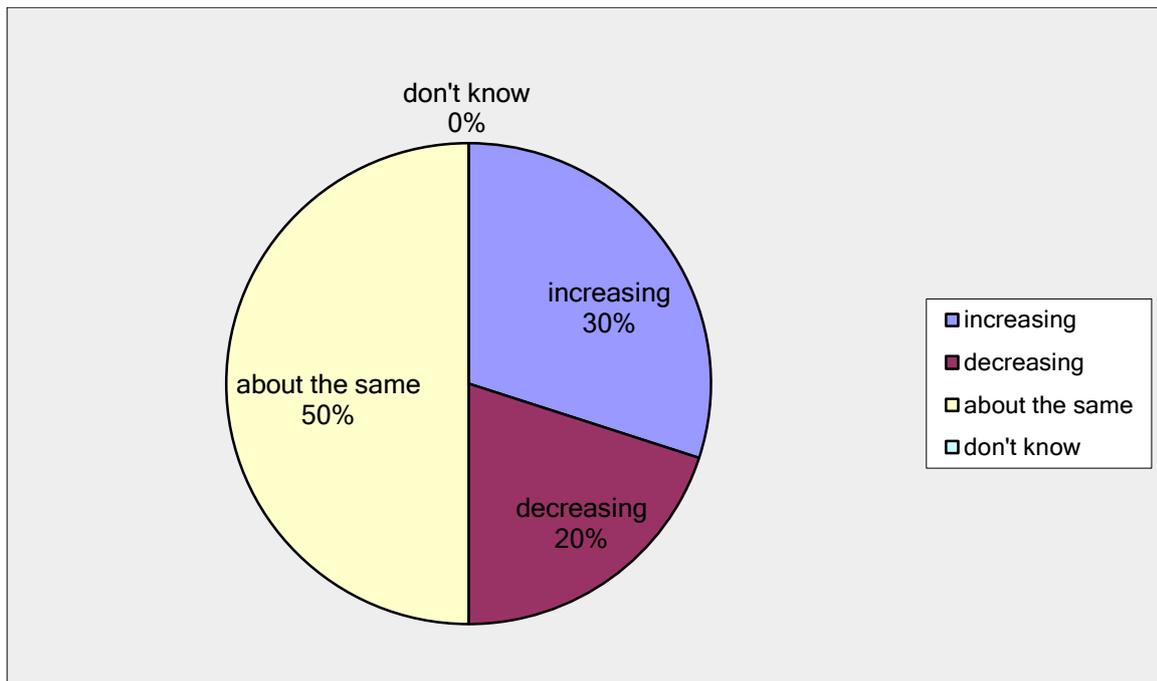
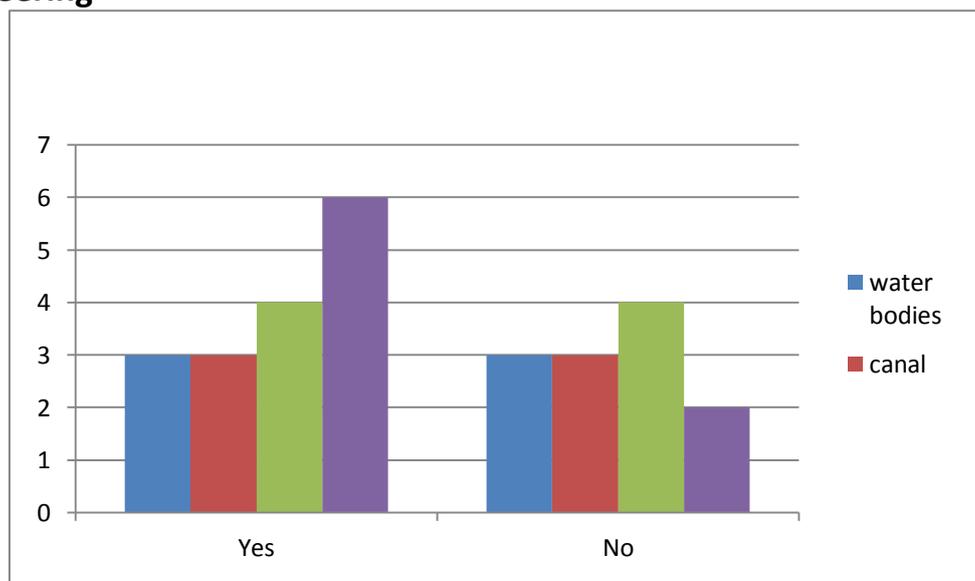


Fig. 5 shows views on the trend of volunteering. 30% [56%] thought it is at an increase, 20% thought the opposite, while the other 50% [33%] thought it would stay the same. Respondents viewed that the main reason for a decrease is the issue of funding. However, it is noted that dedicated and committed volunteers can make a difference to the green spaces.

Fig. 6 Areas of Volunteering Organisations' interest in expanding volunteering

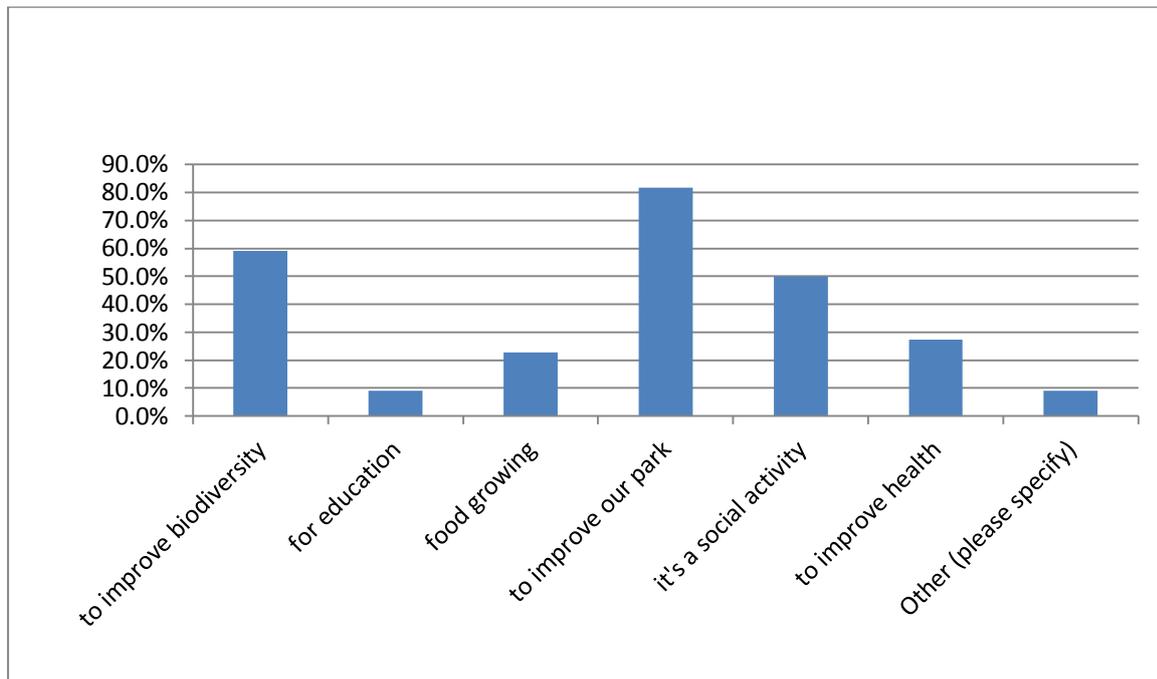


The final question on links with health providers showed only 20% [22%] of volunteering organisations have formal links. Out of the 80% that did not, 30% [56%] showed interest in making links.

6 Summary of Friends' Groups' responses

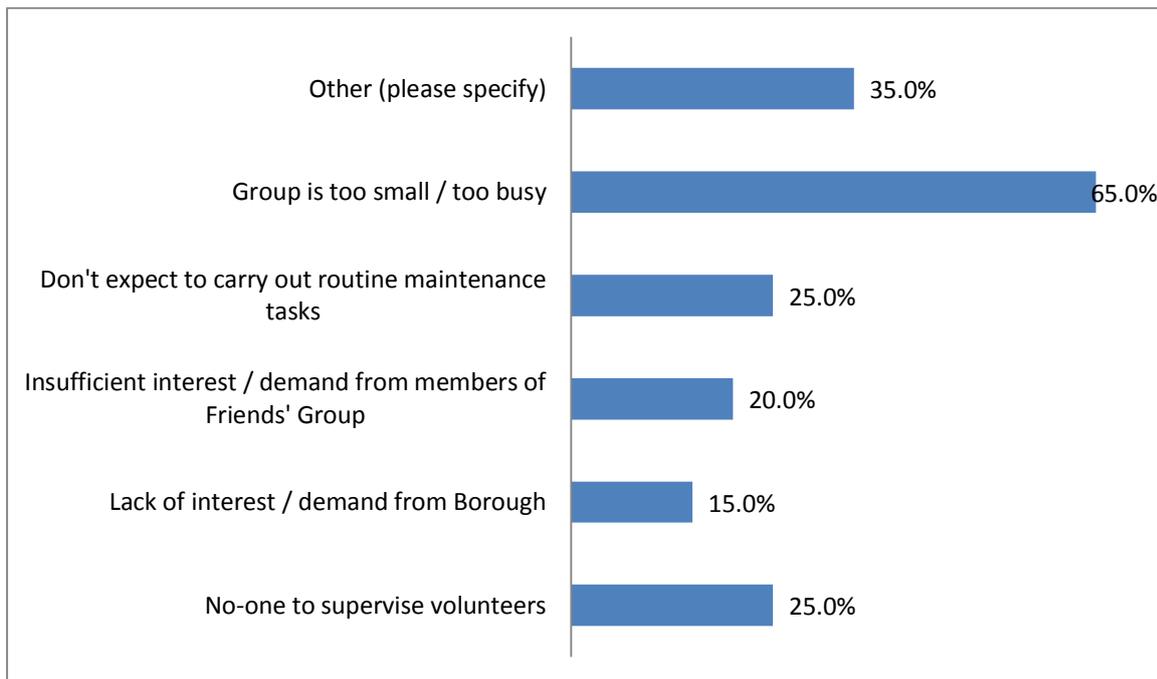
22 [76] responses were received from the Friends' Groups. The drop in number of respondents could mean a less representative set of results of volunteering activities in London.

Fig 7: Ranking of members' drivers of volunteering:



Other drivers include general passion in gardening, restoring historical features of parks and organising events at the parks.

When asked to state their main volunteering activities in order of importance, practical and committee activities came first, followed by events. They were held mostly weekly and monthly, some were held seasonally.

Fig. 8 Factors that prevent members from volunteering more

Most of the respondents showed concerns over the overall size of the Friends' Groups and the lack of staff that limited volunteering activities. 65% of Friends' Groups found groups being too small or too busy as the main contributor. Other factors include some from the volunteers' end, for example, their own work or family commitments.

To recruit volunteers, 86% [93%] of the Friends' Groups primarily rely on words of mouth, followed by the use of websites with 71% [51%] and with Friends' Group network- 62% [51%]. Some groups recruited via resident's bulletin, advertising notices in shops or events.

Website	Word of mouth	Newsletters	Local Volunteer Centre	Friends' Group network	Other organisations
15	18	8	2	13	1

*21 responses were received.

“Adults” and “retired” were the two main categories of volunteers, each with 67%. 48% of Friends’ Groups welcomed any volunteers. Some volunteers were children and some were those that were unemployed. Further, none [9%] of the Friends’ Groups carried out volunteer satisfaction surveys.

In terms of practical tasks, 86% [87%] were led by members of the Friends’ Groups, 24% [27%] were led by council staff. Other groups, 14% [19%], like The Conservation Group, Garden Club Leader or the Scouts Leader Groups would take on the leading role too.

85% of Friends’ Groups received various support from the Council to carry out volunteering. 5% had training and tools and equipment, 10% had funding, while 15% were offered supervision. Other specific supports were lease and grounds maintenance of garden, plants, office space & storage space. Some noted the moral support and encouragement from the Councils, maintaining good relationship with park worker and the Council.

“Having Parks and Open Spaces provide an annual amount if we comply to certain criteria. They will lend tools on request. Some guidance can be offered if asked for. We also meet on an annual basis to discuss what criteria is required for further funding of our Friends group”

- Friends of Cottons Park

In terms of training offered to volunteers, 58% [59%] taught volunteers basic use of tools and equipment, 26% [57%] about health and safety and supervisory/leadership skills 11% [23%].

55% [50%] recorded how much volunteering takes place. 18 [42] Friends’ Groups recorded roughly 6,700 [37,694] hours, ranging from 36 hours to 3500 [12 to 12,480] hours, involving approximately 365 volunteers per annum. Some Groups raised the issue that some of the figures only recorded hours spent in the field, actual hours could be a lot higher when taken into account hours spent on admin work or meetings with Parks Department.

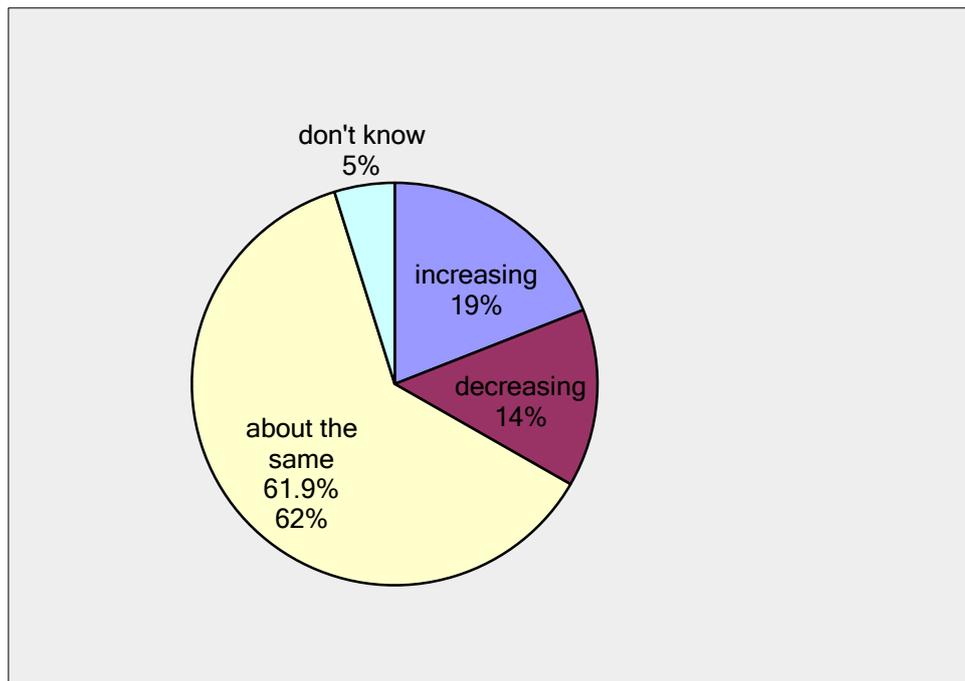
Fig.9 Friends' Groups' views on volunteering trend

Fig. 9 shows that most groups 62% [66%] expect volunteering to stay about the same, where one commented "People come and go. Some leave other join." Some, 20%, expect it to increase while 14% think it will decrease. Nonetheless, 81% of Friends Groups would like to increase volunteering in their parks, but it is important to support them with more volunteer co-ordinator or supervisor and funding. 40% [64%] of Groups showed interest in receiving support from the former, and 27% [64%] from the latter.

Only 5% [11%] have links with local health providers, 40% [51%] would like to be linked up but more than half 55% are not interested in making links.

65% have wildlife monitoring on their site, but among them only 8% share the information with GiGL (London's environmental records centre). However, of those that do not currently have wildlife monitoring, or those that do not share the information with GiGL, 71% are willing to discuss and cooperate with GiGL. The above data has revealed a lack of awareness of GiGL and coverage of wildlife monitoring.

Further, 72% of Friends' Groups are interested to be trained in gathering biological data, while 89% are happy to share their knowledge about the site with GiGL. Some raised concerns over the actual size of the park for room for biodiversity and the need to dedicate some specially trained staff to record biodiversity.

Appendix

Organisations that completed surveys

Volunteering Organisations:

2010	2011	2012	
		Barking and Dagenham	
Bat Conservation Trust			
		Bunhill Fields Quaker Meeting	
BTCV	BTCV		
Ecolocal			
Embrace Cooperation Ltd	Embrace Cooperation Ltd		
		Friends of Shrewsbury Park	
Froglife			
Groundwork London	Groundwork London		
London Wetland Centre	London Wetland Centre	London Wetland Centre	
London Wildlife	London Wildlife	London Wildlife	
		Newham Conservation Volunteers	
MAG Hayes End			
		Open Garden Squares Weekend	
		Pensford Field Environmental Trust	
Sustrans	Sustrans		
Thames 21			
		The Conservation Volunteers	
Trees for Cities Trees for Cities	Trees for Cities Trees for Cities		
		Thames Strategy Kew - Chelsea	
Walk England	Walk England		
Woodland Trust	Woodland Trust		

Friends' Groups:

Avery Hill Park
Barn Hill Conservation Group
Friends of Abbey Gardens
Friends of Burgess Park
Friends of Bury Lodge Park
Friends of Cottons Park
Friends of Dundonald Park
Friends of Eton Grove Park
Friends of Forest Lane Park
Friends of Fortune Green
Friends of Grovelands Park

Friends of John Innes Park
Friends of Lordship Rec
Friends of Mayow Park
Friends of Queen's Wood
Friends of Royston Park
Friends of Twickenham Green
Quaker Gardens
Stoke Newington Common
Users Group
TSKC
Upminster Park

Landowners:

2010	2011	2012	
London Boroughs			
Barking & Dagenham			
	Barnet		
Bexley			
Brent			
Bromley			
Camden	Camden		
City of London Corp.	City of London Corp (Epping Forest)		
Croydon	Croydon	Croydon	
	Ealing		
Greenwich			
	Haringey		
Hounslow			
Islington	Islington	Islington	
Kensington & Chelsea	Kensington & Chelsea	Kensington & Chelsea	
Kingston upon Thames			
Lambeth	Lambeth		
Lewisham	Lewisham (Glendale)		
Merton	Merton	Merton	
	Newham		
Redbridge			
Richmond upon Thames	Richmond upon Thames	Richmond upon Thames	
Southwark	Southwark	Southwark	
Sutton	Sutton		
	Tower Hamlets		
	Waltham Forest		
City Farms			
Dean City Farm			
Stepney City Farm			
Surrey Docks City Farm			
Vauxhall City Farm			
Others			
	Alexandra Palace Charitable Trust	Alexandra Palace Charitable Trust	
Environment Agency	Environment Agency		
		Active Newham	

The Forestry Commission			
The Royal Parks			
	Lee Valley Park		